District Review Report

School District No. 78 (Fraser-Cascade)

April 12 - 15, 2004

Submitted to the Minister of Education

By District Review Team Chair
Gary Graf, Superintendent, School District No. 54 (Bulkley Valley)

District Review Report

2003/2004

District Name:	Fraser-Cascade
District Number:	78
Superintendent:	Wes Neumeier
Date of Visit:	April 12 – 15, 2004
Team Chair:	Gary Graf, Superintendent, SD 54 (Bulkley Valley)
Team Members:	Claude Hrycaiko, Parent, SD 43 (Coquitlam) Afton Wright, Senior Evaluation Advisor, Ministry of Education Gayle Bedard, Administrative Principal for Aboriginal Education, SD 36 (Surrey) Kristi Clifton, Program Coordinator, SD 52 (Prince Rupert) Elizabeth Thompson, Director of Instruction, SD 43 (Coquitlam)

Context

School District No. 78 (Fraser-Cascade) bridges the traditional territory of the Sto:lo and Nlaka'pamux Nations and serves the communities of Boston Bar, Yale, Hope, Harrison Hot Springs, Agassiz, Kent and Silver Creek.

The District is organized around 13 schools serving 2,312 students. The District continues to address challenges related to the amalgamation of two school districts.

The District has experienced declining enrolment at slightly more than 2% over the past two years and is anticipating a further decline to approximately 2,064 students by 2012.

The District spans two regional jurisdictions of the Ministry of Children and Family Development. In March 2003, 8.3% of families in Fraser/Cascade received income assistance compared to 4.8% provincially.

The Aboriginal student population has grown to be greater than 20%.

The School District completed a Core Review in 2002 – 2003 and an Aboriginal Enhancement Agreement is currently being developed.

The District has developed a 3-year plan addressing reading, writing, social responsibility and Aboriginal student success. A fourth, "stretch goal" addresses the achievement of all students. This plan is a "work in progress" in that there have been revisions since the 2003/2004 plan was submitted to the Ministry of Education in October 2003. These goal areas are intended to focus the entire district on significant and unique aspects of student achievement.

District Review Report

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Summary of Process

The purposes of a School District Review are to:

- Review school district and school achievement data
- Review the School District performance plan (accountability contract) and school plans to improve student achievement
- Determine the capacity of the school district to support schools in improving student achievement
- Make recommendations to the school district and to the Minister about improving student achievement
- Identify promising practices that might assist other school districts and schools

The District Review Team, in addressing these purposes, also reviewed the processes related to the development of the Plan and to the revisions of the Plan. The School District Review Team also reviewed the connections between the data and the goals and between the district and school plans.

The District Review Team Chair met with the Superintendent on the day prior to the team visit.

The District Review Team held an initial planning meeting to review the District Performance Plan and to discuss the review process.

The District Review Team reviewed school plans with the School Planning Councils at the following schools: Silver Creek (K-7), District Alternate (9-12), C.E. Barry (5-7), Coquihalla K-4), Hope Alternate (7-8), Hope Secondary (8- 12), Kent (K-6), Agassiz Elementary / Secondary (7-12), Boston Bar (K-12), McCaffrey (7-10), Harrison (K-6), Yale (K-6), and Agassiz Continuing Education.

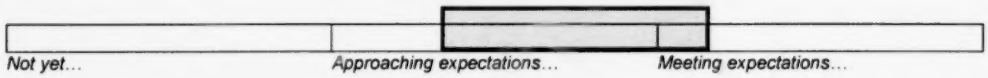
The District Review Team met with the District Internal Review Team, the Aboriginal Education Council and the District Parent Advisory Council.

At the end of the visit, the District Review Team debriefed with a group of district officials and Trustees, followed by an open meeting.

The District Review Team was very appreciative of the openness of all groups in providing information and responding to questions of the team.

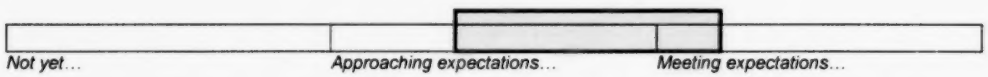
Observations in Key Areas - Focus on Student Achievement

1. *Goals:*
   Improving districts and schools have a strong instructional focus. This focus is made visible in relevant goals for improving achievement for all students.



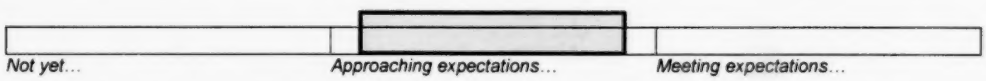
- The District has recently revised the performance plan to focus on three goals and a "stretch" goal addressing student achievement.
- The linkages between the evidence and goals in the District growth plan need to be more clearly shown.
- To provide greater instructional focus, specific objectives need to be identified for each goal area.
- School improvement goals are presently being revised and updated to more precisely focus on student achievement.
- The broad nature of the "stretch goal" may detract from the other goal areas.

2. *Rationale:*
   Improving districts and schools have a thorough and connected set of reasons, **based on evidence**, for the selection of their student achievement goals.



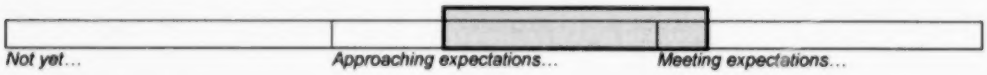
- The District goals have been derived from a number of data sources.
- The District plan does not provide an interpretation of the relevant data.
- Schools vary in the degree to which improvement plans are based upon achievement data.

3. *Data:*
   Improving districts and schools are actively considering at least three sources of evidence including classroom, school, district and provincial data. The analysis of this evidence informs the selection of the district goals and is used to monitor progress.



- The District and most schools are at the early stages of collecting baseline data.
- The District needs to align their data sources with specific objectives.
- The District and many schools are collecting student behavior records in a systematic way.
- Increasingly, school-based data is being used to understand trends over time.
- Aboriginal data is not being disaggregated consistently in schools.

4. *Strategies:*
Improving districts and schools have well-organized, focused improvement plans in place. The strategies selected to achieve the goals are an intelligent blend of research, best practice, and innovative thinking.

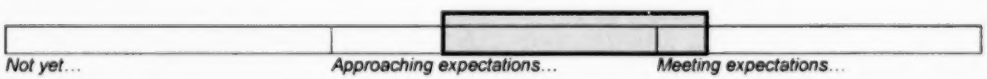


- Practical and research-based strategies, along with staff development, are evident in the areas of early literacy intervention and safe school initiatives.
- The District needs to be clearer in showing the connection between specific strategies and student achievement.
- Strategies addressing the Aboriginal student success goal are not clearly evident in many of the school plans.
- Some school plans need to clearly articulate classroom strategies.

5. *Structures:*
Improving districts and schools have aligned structures – resources, time, and organizations – to get the results they want. This includes, but is not limited to, effectively differentiating resources in the areas of highest need for improvement.

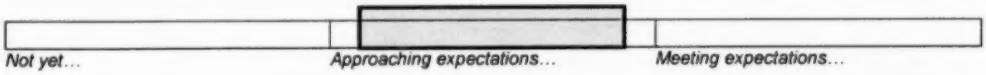
- The District has effectively aligned resources, time, and organization to support a variety of programs and needs such as the District Early Literacy Initiative.
- The District has transparent planning and resource allocation practices.
- A strong, district-wide commitment to the Aboriginal Enhancement Agreement within realistic timelines is needed.
- Many schools have changed structures to align with school and district goals.

6. *Results:*
Improving districts and schools get improved results – at the classroom, school and district levels.



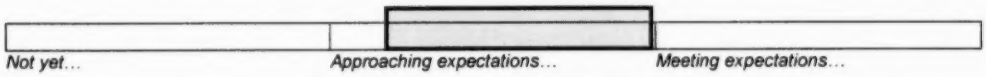
- The plan has set year-over-year performance targets.
- In many instances, the current year has been identified as the baseline year for a number of measures.
- There is a need for analysis of school district data regarding the performance of Aboriginal students.
- Schools are using a range of internal measures as well as a variety of standardized assessments to track results and make adjustments to improve student learning.

7. *Communication:*
Improving districts and schools are involved in continuous dialogue about student achievement and make public their improvement goals and the progress being made in specific areas of focus.



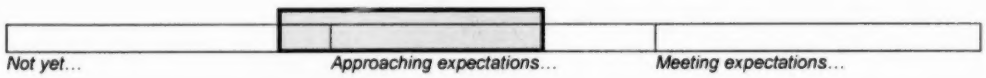
- The District uses a variety of ways to communicate with parents and the community.
- Some Parent Advisory Councils have produced newsletters to assist in parent understanding of the planning process.
- Ongoing dialogue with parents about student achievement is in its early stages and needs to become a significant theme in all communications.
- Additional opportunities for networking around student achievement are being explored.

8. *Teamwork – District and School Coherence*:
Improving districts and schools have an interactive strategy for connecting school and district goals. School uniqueness and school district directions are both valued.



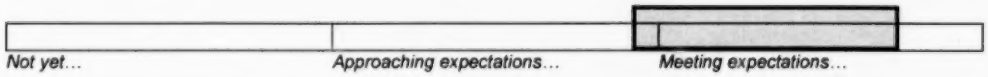
- The district / school plan connections are evolving, given that the district plan has been recently revised in structure and content.
- The district plan has been influenced by school plans and school plans consider district goals.
- Alignment with the Literacy and Social Responsibility goals between District and schools is evident.
- Expectations for the inclusion of an Aboriginal student success goal in school growth plans need to be clarified.

9. *Teamwork – District and Parent Involvement*:
Improving districts and schools work as a team with parents, including specific groups of parents, to improve student achievement.



- Parent involvement is welcomed and evident.
- DPAC and PACs have indicated their desire to expand their involvement and become more involved and recognized as full participating partners in district decision making.
- The relationship between the District and DPAC could be formalized.
- Many School Planning Councils are in their early stages of formation and will become more actively involved in future planning cycles.
- Strategies for engaging Aboriginal parents are desired.

10. *Leadership / Teamwork:*
Leaders in improving districts and schools have a clear vision for, and commitment to improving achievement for all students. Leadership at all levels, in all roles, is encouraged and systematically developed in a collaborative learning community with a focus on improving student achievement.



- Teamwork and mutual respect is evident and demonstrates a sense of "shared leadership" and commitment to the district plan.
- The District and School-based Leadership Team addresses student achievement at their regular monthly meetings.
- Shared inquiry around student achievement will continue to build a learning community.
- The Board engages in dialogue about student learning and participates in an annual retreat with the administration team regarding the district growth plan.
- The Professional Development planning process considers District and school plans.

Strengths

Fraser-Cascade is a District that is in the process of refining a plan to develop a clear, district-wide focus on student achievement. Strengths observed by the team are:

- All members of the district community show a strong, caring and respectful commitment to student learning and are working towards being a community of learners.
- Strong, positive relationships are evident.
- A significant and positive focus on early literacy and the district-wide alignment around this goal is apparent.
- The Aboriginal Education Council advocates for Aboriginal students.
- The Local Education Agreements with the Bands and the renewed focus on the Enhancement Agreement provide positive direction.
- The Core Review Process has supported the entire district in creating operational efficiencies that support student learning.
- The Applied Skills Initiative at Boston Bar Elementary Secondary is providing an increased set of options for students within a small secondary environment.
- Regular staff meetings, focused on student learning, occur in a number of schools.
- A variety of options including a strong alternative education program support a wide range of learner needs.
- A rehabilitation program serves as an alternative to suspensions.
- The Continuing Education Program provides an opportunity for students to connect with post-secondary alternatives within their own community.

Promising Practices

Promising practices observed by the team that may be useful to other districts in improving student achievement are:

- A District Early School Success Program that has expanded to Grade 4 is developing focused and sharp instruction across the district.
- The DERAIT (District Early Reading Assessment Instrument Test).
- Functional Behavior Assessments in partnership with the University College of the Fraser Valley address the Social Responsibility goal. (Supported by Community Links funding).

The Team believes the following practices are worthy of note:

- An on-line Individualized Education Planning tool to provide data regarding student achievement on IEP goals.
- Quarterly meetings with Aboriginal parents, after each report card, to review student achievement.
- The District "Challenges Program" for students with characteristics of giftedness.

Recommendations

Team recommendations for strengthening school and district focus on student achievement and for improving results include the following points:

- The fourth "stretch goal" may be unnecessary.
- Adhere more closely to the District Planning Criteria (SMART) for all school and district plans.
- Continue to invite the District Parent Advisory Council voice to district planning processes.
- Consider a restructuring of the Aboriginal Education Program to include an Aboriginal Education Administrator who advances the Aboriginal student success goal throughout the district.
- Encourage all schools to follow the lead of the Province and the District in disaggregating Aboriginal student achievement data.
- Support the quarterly meetings with the Aboriginal communities to address student success after each reporting period.
- Address the perception that all significant meetings are primarily held in Hope.
- Wider use of Performance Standards is recommended, as an additional source of student achievement data.

Priorities

- Refine the district planning template to provide greater consistency and a simpler way of connecting school and district plans; and to provide a greater link between goals, rationale, data, strategies and structures within the district performance plan.
- Each broad goal of the district plan should be accompanied by specific objectives that allow for greater clarity and focus